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ABSTRACT

The present Universal Primary Education Scheme which was launched in Nigeria in 1976 calls for innovation in curriculum development, classroom teaching techniques, and adequate supervision of instructional programs in the schools. The type of education imported to Nigeria under British control reflected the needs of the colonial government. Quality and relevance are the two features that curriculum development in Nigeria now needs. One impediment to curriculum reform is the system of external examinations around which the curriculum tends to be based. The school should play a leading role in teaching the importance of national unity, and each subject in the curriculum must have a way of inculcating national consciousness in the children. The ultimate goal should be to develop well informed and knowledgeable citizens. (Author/RLV)

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NEW APPROACHES TO CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

by

Bolarinde J. Obebe

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NEW APPROACHES TO CURRICULUM
DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

Introduction

The title of this paper implies an ongoing process. That something has been, something is, and it will continue to be. But in continuing to be, there must be new approaches to what is being done in order to bring about something new, useful and appropriate for the changing time. That something is new not because it has never been there before, but because it has changed in quality. Quality and relevance are the two features that curriculum development in Nigerian schools must now possess. The present Universal Primary Education Scheme which was launched in Nigeria in September of 1976 and which is now in its third year calls for innovation in curriculum development, classroom teaching techniques and adequate supervision of instructional programs in the school.

In writing about this topic or curriculum development in Nigeria, one becomes an historian. Like other historical people, one can tell stories of where he has been, where he is now, and where he is going. He is on a pilgrimage for which his education must have prepared him and encouraged him to go on. Herbert M. Kliebard writing on "The Curriculum Field in Retrospect" says, "... our inability or our unwillingness to develop a sense of where we are in relation to where we have been in curriculum has created a kind of astigmatism such that we cannot see the past for the present nor the present for the past."[1]

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[1]Herbert M. Kliebard, "The Curriculum Field in Retrospect" in Technology and the Curriculum, ed. by Paul W.F. Witt (New York: Teachers College Press, 1968), p. 69.

One needs to see the past as it affects the present and possibly project to the future. It is necessary to learn from the lessons of history so as to improve the present and prepare for a better future.

A Brief History of Education in Nigeria

In Nigeria today there exist three different types of education, each with its own distinct curriculum. These are the indigenous, Muslim and Western educations. According to Ade Fajana, "The oldest of them all is the indigenous education which is as old as the country itself but which has not been accorded due recognition by writers because until recently few have been able to identify its main characteristics."[2] The content of the curriculum of this type of education is as comprehensive in scope as any known system, be it Greek or Roman or European. The education is not institutional because it is given anywhere, anytime and by anybody who possesses the knowledge above the learners without a strict timetable. Every adult contributes to the learning of the child in his seeking those things that will make the society accept him as he grows to adulthood. There is need for respect for elders, intellectual development and learning some skills to prepare for a suitable vocation later in life. This system of education prepares and educates well-integrated citizens in the traditional society.

The Muslim education was first introduced to the northern part of Nigeria about the eleventh century A.D. and had spread by the fourteenth

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[2]Ade Fajana, "A Brief History of Education in Nigeria" in UPE: Issues, Prospects and Problems, ed. by N.A. Nwagwu (Benin City, Nigeria: Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 1976), p. 17.

century throughout the Hausa land not only in the northern part of Nigeria, but also along the Savannah Belt of West Africa. The curriculum featured stories about the prophet and some elementary history of Muslim religion. The students studied the Koran and learned from their teachers to become good Muslims by acquiring the habits of prayers and worship. The education suited the society it served. The great imbalance that we talk about concerning the knowledge gained from being exposed to Western education between the south and north of Nigeria today is attributable in part to the north's holding too much to an inherited system which was good for its time.

The Yoruba immigrants who returned to Nigeria after the slaves were freed in the 1800's wanted the missionaries to come and instruct them. Between 1842 and 1900, various missions established themselves in various parts of Nigeria. The Western type of education came with the missionaries, whose immediate concern on arrival to a particular post was to build a school to attract the young ones. Just as the Muslim education featured a curriculum that suited the society it served, the mission schools were to serve "as an instrument of Christian evangelisation: The curriculum consisted of the Four R's and reading materials were provided from chapters in the Bible."[3]

The government did not do anything about the education of the people for a long time. Missions were given grants-in-aid and in return the government got graduates of the mission schools to work in their offices. By 1882 there was an Education Ordinance which brought the government to the show of what was happening in the schools. Her Majesty's Inspector

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[3] Ibid., p. 20.

of schools was appointed "to inspect the schools and correct defects, conduct examinations for the teachers and issue certificates and recommend grants according to the results of the school examination."[4] Henry Carr, who later became a respectable educator in Nigerian history, assisted Rev. Metcalfe Sunter, the first of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools. The role which the Inspector of School's assignments has played--and still plays in Nigerian education today--shall be discussed later in this paper.

Nigeria became a British subject through the efforts of the early missionaries, the European traders, and the early administrators who were sent to the "Protectorate of the Southern Provinces," as the South was referred to at that time. On January 1, 1914, Nigeria became a physical entity as it is known today. The Colony of Lagos and the southern and northern provinces were amalgamated. Nigeria as a colony to Britain would henceforth be controlled for the "Home Government" by its agents in the field. When Sir Fredrick Lugard became Governor General in 1912, he was very much concerned about how to get enough clerks and technicians to serve the government departments and private sector. He believed that education was the key to a smooth and effective government.

The British Educational System had to be imported to Nigeria from Britain where, according to Denis Lawton, "... the public school/grammar school tradition of education for leadership, which gave rise to a curriculum for 'Christian gentlemen' who would become leaders of society--managers in industry at home or district officers in the colonies"[5] was

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[4] Ibid., p. 21.

[5] Denis Lawton, Class, Culture and the Curriculum (London & Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 25.

in practice. According to him, "Those who were to fill such roles were seen as needing a particular kind of character training, and secondly, the kind of knowledge which would be an obvious badge of their exclusive rank. For this purpose it was appropriate that the curriculum be based upon the classical foundations provided by Greek and Latin."[6]

The behavior of the administrators who were sent to Nigeria affected and is still reflected in attitudes of educated Nigerians to manual work today. The administrators' hands were to be clean for "twenty-four hours" a day, and their dresses were not to be stained. They were as lady-like as the Queen they represented in the colonies. [Today some educated Nigerian engineers, agriculturists and plumbers ~~will~~ can be seen with suits and ties in a porched office with many attendants at their beck-and-call rather than to be in their various fields where their knowledge could be utilized in a much more practical way.] Our road builders and overhead flyover contractors are foreigners whom many of us see and laugh at. They are Germans, French and Italians who are in Nigeria with the American belief in "Rugged Individualism." They are sincerely doing the work and making the money, too.

[ ] may be left out.

The type of education imported to Nigeria was what Lawton calls "the elementary school tradition: intended to train the lower orders." The curriculum therefore reflected the training for those who were unfortunate not to go through the mainstream to be obedient and have respect for the property of their betters. The type of class and the culture the society wanted were reflected in the curriculum. The situation continued until the 1944 Education Act was enacted. An attempt was made for

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[6] Ibid., p. 25.

equality of opportunity for secondary education. The new problem that surfaced was not that of selection because of the anticipated future role but because of school organization which was not going to have a common curriculum. Whatever happened in Britain in the educational system was reflected in Nigeria. As late as 1955 the "old" Western Nigeria (now Ogun, Ondo and Oyo states) introduced the "secondary modern school" system. This writer was one of the pioneers in the system. One becomes bitter as he reads to find out that the secondary modern school system was designed for people of the "lower orders." By attending this system, this writer had to go through his teacher training programs by installments. After two years in the secondary modern school, he taught for a year at an elementary school, then went to a four-year teacher training institution, came out, taught two years and went back for another three years of advanced training program before finally finding his way to the University, where he has again spent three to four years studying for one degree or another.

In Nigeria, there are diverse educational traditions, as already discussed, and the influences the traditional, Muslim and Western education systems played are with us.

The New Approaches

What then are the new approaches to the curriculum development that Nigeria needs? It will be necessary to identify the type of curriculum that is being discussed. Writing on the "two levels of Educational Experience" in his book The Curriculum, Franklin Bobbit examined the two sides of the argument concerning those who believed that the end of

education is the "ability to live" and the other "ability to produce." In drawing an interesting analogy, he said, "Now which side is right? Doubtless both are right. It is like asking the question 'Which shall the tree produce, the flower or the fruit?' It must produce both or it will not perform its full function."[7]

Nigeria needs a comprehensive curriculum for those who are in the school. The curriculum must be meaningful, adaptable to the changing needs of the society, practical and relevant. If not, it will not perform its full function.

The search for his type of curriculum began in Nigeria in 1969. All that had been done prior to this time had been elimination and substitution of topics in the school syllabus. From September 9-12, 1969, a National Curriculum Conference was held in Lagos. It was a means of identifying "new national goals for education in Nigeria at all levels (primary, secondary and tertiary) and providing guidelines on what the system should be accomplishing with respect to:

(1) the needs of youth and adult individuals in our society;

(2) the socio-economic needs, values, aspiration and development of our society; and

(3) the curriculum substance, the subject content of the system which is the means to the goals.[8]

The year 1969 will remain an important year in the history of

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[7]Franklin Bobbit, The Curriculum (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1923).

[8]Federal Ministry of Education Report of the National Curriculum Conference, 8th-12th September, 1969, Lagos, Nigeria Educational Research Council.

curriculum movement in Nigeria. All the participants at the National Curriculum Conference were Nigerians and foreign educationists attending as observers. As a follow-up to this, conferences that dealt in details with subject areas were held. In 1971 there was the National Workshop on Primary Education which was held in Ibadan. Most of the participants were university personnel from all over Nigeria. Six subject committees were set up and objectives for each subject area were stated. These subject areas were Cultural and Creative Arts, Languages, Mathematics, Physical and Health Education, Science and Social Studies.

The report of this workshop was published by Nigeria Educational Research Council as Guidelines on Primary School Curriculum: Report of the National Workshop on Primary Education, April 26 to May 8, 1971. The report reflects the thinking by groups of subject experts.

The Role of External Examinations

One great problem besets the smooth running of each of the recommendations made at the various workshops--the application at the classroom level. The teacher subjected the curriculum to external examinations. Examinations exert a lot of influence on the school curriculum in Nigeria. This goes back to the role the Inspector of Schools was to play following the Education Ordinance of 1882. The inspector, in addition to all other functions, was to "recommend grants according to the results of the school examination." Since the 1882 Education Ordinance, our curriculum had featured liberal arts subjects which prepared our students for entry into British universities and colleges. The secondary school syllabus up to the early sixties featured such subjects as Latin and Greek. Students

in the secondary school were prepared for terminal examinations that were conducted by the Universities of Cambridge and London. The examinations were not specifically designed for West Africa. The secondary school curriculum suffered more from external examinations than that of the primary school. The terminal examinations for the primary school pupils were conducted by the various state ministries of education. This itself is an external examination for the school; the teachers prepare their pupils for the examination since good passes from the school dictate the tone of the school to the public. The examination systems in Nigeria have great influence on the curriculum. Unless less emphasis is placed on the acquisition of certificates and diplomas, the curriculum will continue to be subjected to examination requirements.

For the secondary school terminal examination, the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate was replaced by a West African School Certificate, and the Univeristy of London Matriculation Examinations have been replaced by the General Certificate of Education for overseas candidates. Although the West African School Certificate Examination Council has taken over the responsibilities of the Universities of Cambridge and London, the conduct of the examination itself is still essentially under the same conditions. The Nigerian public is always sensitive to the results of the West African School Certificate Examinations. Over the years it has generated a lot of controversy. There have been a lot of examination leakages where the examination questions have been seen before the date of the examination. The situation became so bad that the federal government had to set up a commission of inquiry early in 1978 to look into the causes of the frequent leakages and make recommendations to

the government as to whether the West African Examination Council should continue to conduct the school certificate examinations. The committee, as of the middle of 1978, had submitted its report to the government, and the Government White Paper on this is awaited. The mad rush for examination questions before the examination is a result of the importance placed on the acquisition of certificates and diplomas in the Nigerian educational system. This has to change towards making the curriculum of the school functional and relevant to the needs of the society.

The "Old" Secondary School Curriculum

What has been the content of the Secondary School curriculum itself? The answer can be found from the conditions laid down for obtaining the West African School certificate.

"To obtain the full West African School certificate, the candidate must fulfill one of the following:

(a) obtain a certain aggregate mark in his six best subjects; and

(b) either pass in at least six subjects, one of which must be at the credit level; or

(c) pass in five subjects, at least two of which must be passed at the credit level."[9]

The subjects in which the candidates are examined are in groups. "Every candidate for the examination must choose subjects in at least three of the following six groups of subjects:

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[9] J.E. Adetoro, The Handbook of Education in Nigeria (Ibadan, Nigeria: African Education Press, 1966), p. 125.

Group I. Languages: English, Latin, Greek, French, German, Efik, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Arabic

Group II. General Subjects: English, Literature, Bible Knowledge, Islamic Religious Knowledge, History, Geography

Group III. Mathematical Subjects: Mathematics, Additional Mathematics

Group IV. General Science, Additional General Science, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Agricultural Sciences

Group V. Arts and Crafts: Art, Music, Woodwork, Metalwork, Needlework and Dressmaking, Cookery, Home Management

Group VI. Technical and Commercial Subjects: Geometrical and Mechanical Drawing, Geometrical and Building Drawing, Commercial Studies, Principles of Accounts, Health Science

A candidate who offers additional mathematics or additional general science may take nine subjects in all. All other candidates are restricted to a maximum of eight subjects."[10]

Most of the candidates who obtain their school certificate diploma seek employment in the cities. They are always after the white collar jobs where their hands will not be soiled or their dresses stained. This attitude is not peculiar to the school certificate diploma holders. It is equally true of Nigerian university graduates. As it has been mentioned earlier, this type of attitude goes back to what was copied from the early administrators of the country who came to represent the "Home Government" in Britain.

The white collar job seekers in the cities are always more than the

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[10] Ibid., p. 125.

number of jobs that are available. Since the type of education they received has not given them an alternative choice, they remain unemployed and the university graduates are underemployed because most commonly after they have searched for the jobs for which they are trained and could not get they usually settle for alternatives in their own case. This means that graduates who cannot get desired jobs usually take to teaching , which always absolves them. They teach the subjects which they took in their school certificate examinations some years past. This in itself is affecting the quality of education and the teaching profession.

The New National Policy on Education

This type of situation that persists has made the educators, journalists and laymen alike ask what exactly is the government policy on education. As one of the follow-ups to the 1969 National Curriculum Conference, a seminar of distinguished educational experts was summoned by the government in 1973 to deliberate on all aspects of a National Policy on Education. In January of 1977, the Federal Ministry of Education released a document entitled Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education. The government viewed education as a way of achieving some national objectives of Nigeria as stated in the second National Development Plan and endorsed as the necessary foundation for the National Policy on Education the building of:

(1) a free and democratic society;

(2) a just and egalitarian society;

(3) a united, strong and self-reliant nation;

(4) a great and dynamic economy;

(5) a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.[11]

This sounds like a chapter from a country's constitution. The National Policy therefore reflects these objectives by laying emphasis on the quality of instruction at all levels to be oriented towards inculcating the following values:

(1) respect for the worth and dignity of the individuals;

(2) faith in man's ability to make rational decisions;

(3) moral and spiritual values in interpersonal and human relations;

(4) shared responsibilities for the common good of society;

(5) respect for the dignity of labours, and

(6) promotion of the emotional, physical and psychological health of all children.[12]

In the National Policy of Education, it is further stated that "for the philosophy to be in harmony with Nigeria's national objectives it has to be geared towards self-realization, better human relationships, individual and national efficiency, effective citizenship, national consciousness, national unity, as well as towards social, cultural, economic, political, and scientific and technological progress."[13] The aims and objectives to which the philosophy is linked are therefore:

(1) the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity;

(2) the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society;

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[11] Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education (Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information Printing Division, 1977), p. 4.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

(3) the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around; and

(4) the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competences, both mental and physical, as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society.[14]

What is contained in all these statements of National Goals and Objectives cannot be achieved by the present system and therefore a change towards a better curriculum is necessary. One central theme that runs through is the emphasis on the building of a democratic society and inculcating in our children national consciousness and national unity.

In a country where there are over two hundred ethnic groups who speak about the same number of languages and are yet joined together by a political boundary, there is need to emphasis national consciousness and national unity. The role that Nigeria is playing in the Assembly of Nations, especially on matters that affect the continent of Africa, makes it incumbent on her to continue to function as a united country no matter what the odds are. A popular slogan during the Nigerian Civil War (1967-70) was "To keep Nigeria one is a task that must be done." Today when the guns have been silenced, human miseries endured or forgotten by those who had the direct experience of the unfortunate incidence of the Civil War, there is still need for the same slogan. The government has made a big move by encouraging the teaching of the three major languages--Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba--to enhance communication among all.

The school therefore should play a leading role in teaching the children the importance of National Unity. This cannot be done in an

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[14] Ibid.

effective manner if the curriculum is geared towards passing examinations alone. Each subject in the curriculum must have a way of inculcating in the children the national consciousness and national unity.

The Social Studies Group at the National Workshop on Primary Education (April 16 to May 8, 1971) saw Social Studies objectives to be part of the general objectives of primary education as a whole. The objectives according to the group "overlap the objectives of the other primary school curriculum such as language, mathematics, science, cultural and creative arts, as well as physical and health education."[15] Through the Social Studies program, the group identified that the following general objectives would be accomplished:

(a) to create an awareness and understanding of the evolving social and physical environment as a whole, its natural man-made, cultural, and spiritual resources together with the rational use and conservation of these resources for development;

(b) to develop a capacity to learn and to acquire certain basic skills, including not only those of listening, speaking, reading and writing, and of calculation, but also the skills of hand, together with the skills of observation, analysis and inference which are essential to the forming of sound judgment;

(c) to ensure the acquisition of that relevant knowledge which is an essential pre-requisite to personal development as well as to a positive personal contribution to the betterment of mankind;

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[15] Guidelines on Primary School Curriculum, Report of the National Workshop on Primary Education, April 26 to May 8, 1971, p. 262.

(d) to develop a sympathetic appreciation of the diversity and interdependence of all members of the local community, and the wider national and international community;

(e) to develop in children a positive attitude to citizenship and a desire in them to make a positive personal contribution to the creation of a united Nigeria.[16]

The objective (d) above is from CREDO, Report of a conference of African educators, EDC and EREDO on Social Studies held at Mombasa, Kenya, 19th-30th August, 1968 (Newton, Massachusetts: Educational Development Center, 1968), pp. 7-8.

These general objectives for the Primary School Social Studies were expanded for the Secondary School Social Studies Curriculum as put together by the Social Studies Group at the National Secondary Education Curriculum Workshop held from 9-23 September, 1973.

In order to fulfill the general objectives identified by the Primary School Social Studies Group. The group emphasized that "the classroom and school climates should give the children opportunities to live creatively with enjoyment of work and leisure. Teachers should encourage children to find out things for themselves, to record their discoveries in writing, in drawing, in modelling, in making things, and perhaps even in acting, miming and in dancing."[17]

Teachers are to encourage the children to think for themselves, discuss freely among themselves and form opinions logically and also appreciate one another in working together. This writer strongly

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[16] Ibid., p. 263.

[17] Ibid.

believes that this type of situation will be possible if the pupils are not subjected too much to passing external examinations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this writer would like to see the Social Studies program in Nigerian schools--primary and secondary--reflect the teaching of the earth as the home of man; families around Nigeria to be studied in comparison with selected families around the continent of Africa and other parts of the world. Regional studies and the history of Nigeria must be studied in detail. As the children move up in the school system, they should study man in a wider society, the political system of the country, area studies around the world and international organizations.

The Social Studies program must begin with the child's immediate environment and then expand from there. The ultimate goal should be to develop a well-informed and knowledgeable citizen.

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